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SPECIAL REPORT

SOVIET SEA POWER

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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SOVIET SEA POWER

Having constructed an impressive force of complex modern warships--including the largest submarine force in the world--the Soviets are increasing their ability to operate this force effectively. Most important in this respect, they are going to sea in greater numbers and at greater distances from the Soviet Union than ever before. Soviet surface ships and submarines are operating frequently in the Mediterranean and Norwegian seas, and Soviet submarines now are deploying out to sea on training and probably operational patrols.

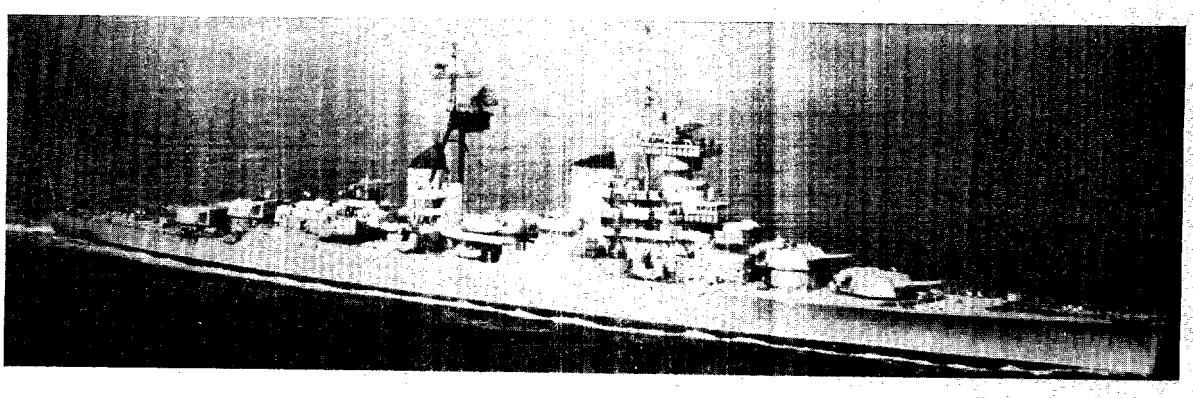
Nevertheless, the lack of an effective antisubmarine warfare program and the absence of support from aircraft carriers and seagoing supply ships make the USSR vulnerable to US Polaris missile attack and virtually preclude sustained Soviet surface-fleet operations at great distances from the USSR. Despite these and other disadvantages imposed by geography and inexperience, however, expanding Soviet naval and maritime strength promises to be of growing importance in the equation of power between East and West.

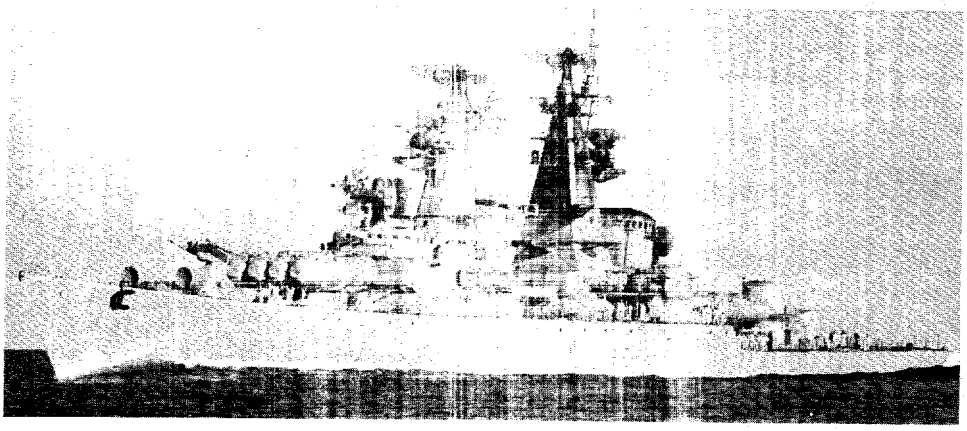
Growth of Soviet Sea Power

Following the unimpressive performance of the Soviet Navy in World War II, Soviet leaders realized that a strong navy would be an important factor in their drive to gain recognition of their great power status. In less than a decade the USSR developed the second largest fleet in the world and continued to maintain the largest submarine force. By Stalin's death in 1953, the naval development program was well advanced; nine cruisers had been completed, construction had begun on two of a programed four heavy cruisers, and construction of aircraft carriers was reportedly planned. The Soviet Navy was becoming a force which might eventually attempt to contest control of the high seas as well as defend the USSR against attack.

Shortly after Stalin's death, however, the changes brought about by the advent of atomic power began to cause doubt about fundamental assumptions on which the naval building program had been based. By the end of 1955, construction of cruisers ceased, and it became apparent to Western observers that no carriers were to be built.

QUALITY VERSUS QUANTITY





The old 16,000-ton SVERDLOV-class light cruiser with its four, triple mounted 6-inch guns is far outclassed in firepower by the new 5,000-ton KYNDA-class guided-missile frigate with its one dual surface-to-air and two quadruple surface-to-surface missile launchers.

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Submarine construction declined sharply in 1957 after the completion of the "W" and "Q" classes and the construction of a record 83 submarines in 1956 --more than any other nation has ever built in a single year.

Soviet leaders apparently recognized that earlier plans to wage an active contest for control of the sea were unrealistic. Nuclear warfare had created an entirely new situation in which submarines could serve as strategic weapons; and small, missile-equipped surface ships could become the equal of much larger conventionally armed vessels. Quality could count for as much as quantity. Although the Soviet Navy would

retain its traditional missions of interdicting the enemy's sea communications, defending the littoral of the USSR, and supporting the seaward flanks of the Red Army, its basic mission was to be expanded to include the strategic defense of the USSR against seaborne nuclear attack and the launching of missile attacks against enemy territory.

It was not until 1958, however, that these new concepts were reflected in the introduction of new ships, armament, and propulsion plants. These were eventually to include conventional and nuclear-powered submarines equipped with ballistic- or cruise-type surface-to-surface missiles, gas turbine propulsion systems, new torpedoes and antisubmarine weapons, and surface ships equipped with surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles.

Soviet Naval Strengths

Today the Soviet Navy, in addition to possessing the world's largest submarine and mine warfare forces, has the most ships with surface-to-surface missiles, the only missile-armed patrol boats, and the only cruise-missile-equipped submarines capable of attacking both shore targets and surface ships at ranges up to 450 miles. After a late start, and partly as a result of delays in the US program, the number of Soviet nuclear submarines now about equals that of the US. The Soviet fleet currently comprises about 390 submarines; 19 cruisers, two of them equipped with guided missiles; 24 guided-missile destroyers; 140 other destroyers and destroyer escorts; and 2,700 patrol, mine warfare, amphibious, and auxiliary vessels including 140 guided-missile patrol boats.

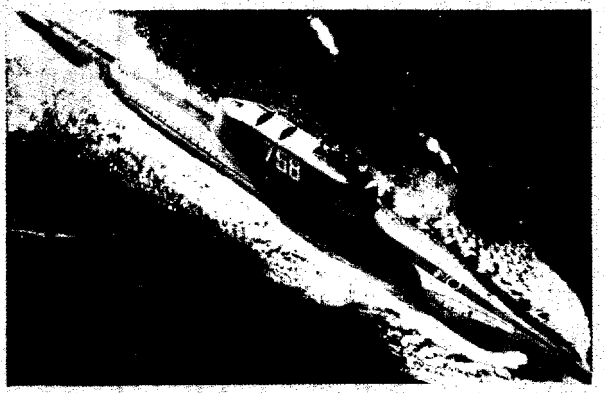
Having begun to construct such an impressive array of complex modern warships, the Soviets sought to increase their ability to operate those forces more effectively. Although the Soviets missed many of the lessons learned by other navies during World War II, they made strenuous efforts to overcome their deficiencies. Operating areas were expanded and joint training exercises held. Soviet submarines began more extended operations.

Since 1963, Soviet naval vessels of all kinds have been going to sea in greater numbers and at greater distances from the USSR than ever before. Since June 1964, Soviet surface ship and submarine detachments have been operating frequently in the Mediterranean and extensive exercises have been conducted in the Norwegian Sea.

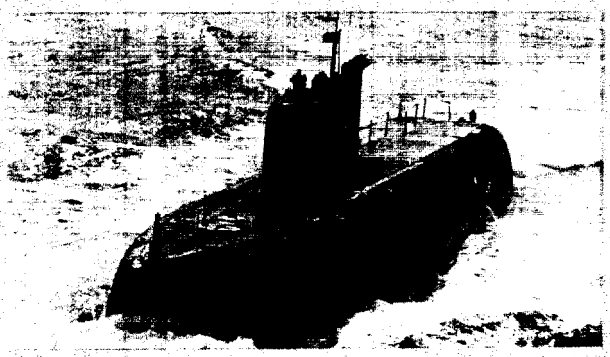
In addition, the navy is being used more extensively for diplomatic purposes. During the past year, Soviet naval vessels made formal port calls to Denmark, Norway, Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Bulgaria; and Soviet naval research ships visited a number of African countries in addition to Canada, the UK, and the US.

SELECTED SOVIET MISSILE SUBMARINES

One of 10 H-class nuclear-powered submarines capable of surface-launching three 350-mile ballistic missiles; a few of these subs have probably been modified for underwater launch of a 700-mile ballistic missile.



Twenty-seven of these conventionally powered G-1 class submarines are believed to be operational; they were built to fire three 350-mile ballistic missiles from the sail area while surfaced.



Four cruise missiles, probably with 450-mile ranges, can be surface-launched from the hulls of the 12 conventionally powered J-class submarines in the Soviet Navy.

SOVIET SUBMARINE ORDER OF BATTLE

	NUCLEAR	CONVENTIONAL	TOTAL
BALLISTIC MISSILE	10	35	45
CRUISE MISSILE	16	25	41
TORPEDO ATTACK	15	292	307
TOTAL	41	352	393

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The Maritime Fleet

Perhaps the most significant development of all, however, has been the tremendous expansion of the Soviet maritime fleet. The USSR, traditionally a land power and one of the world's most self-sufficient nations, historically has found little need for a merchant marine. Following World War II, however, its expanding foreign trade and aggressive foreign policy led to the enlargement of its almost nonexistent merchant fleet. Since 1952, that fleet has more than doubled in tonnage, and since 1962 alone the USSR has risen from eleventh to sixth place among the world's maritime powers. Present construction rates and overseas orders suggest that the announced Soviet intention to have the largest and youngest merchant fleet in the world by 1980 could be achieved.

While the economic importance of this fleet is readily apparent, there are also a number of military advantages. Most of the new ships have sufficient speed, endurance, and capacity to contribute to military sealift capabilities. The delivery of Soviet military equipment to non-Communist countries is almost wholly dependent on Soviet bottoms. The merchant service could also supply auxiliaries and experienced seamen to the navy in time of war, and provide early warning information on the movements of Western air and naval forces during the initial stages of hostilities. Merchant ships can provide logistic support to submarine patrols and can be used to support a variety of operations in other countries.

Chinks in the Armor

In spite of the expanding size and capabilities of Soviet naval and maritime forces since World War II, a number of significant weaknesses remain. Not the least of these are geographic. The USSR's four widely separated fleets cannot provide effective mutual support, have few points of access to the open sea, are frequently hampered by poor weather, and are limited by vulnerable lines of communications to their rear support areas.

The conservative tactics and defensive strategy which so severely limited the effectiveness of the Soviet Navy in World War II continue to influence Soviet naval operations today. For example, Soviet naval strategy still does not call for naval forces sufficient to move amphibious ground forces overseas against enemy opposition or to protect sea communications to distant areas.

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In addition to these inherent weaknesses, Soviet emphasis on submarine warfare, the absence of carrier-based air support, and the lack of adequate

afloat logistic support virtually preclude sustained wartime operations by surface forces at great distances from the USSR. The surface fleet cannot carry the battle to the enemy, and in spite of some improvements in sealift capabilities--including the re-establishment of the Naval Infantry--the Soviets do not appear to be developing sea escort capabilities which might make such long-range operations possible.

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Current Soviet submarine operations also suggest that, in spite of more extensive operations, Soviet submariners continue to be restricted by the conservative traditions inherited from World War II as well as by a certain lack of confidence in the reliability of their vessels.

Probably the Soviet Navy's most significant weakness, however, lies in its almost complete inability to detect and destroy enemy submarines at sea.

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Despite recent Soviet claims to the contrary, US Polaris submarines could expect to operate almost unopposed in the event of hostilities, at least in the near future.

Future of Soviet Sea Power

It is within the USSR's industrial and technological capabilities to overcome many of these weaknesses should it decide to do so. Despite this capability, however, the indications are that the numerical strength and, except for additional guided-missile units, the over-all composition of Soviet surface forces will remain fairly stable over the next few years. The naval air arm will probably be strengthened somewhat, however, by the introduction of additional supersonic-dash Blinder medium bombers and by the development of a new anti-ship air-to-surface missile.

Soviet submarine capabilities will probably be improved before long by the introduction of faster, quieter, and deeper-diving nuclear submarines--perhaps able to achieve speeds of more than 25 knots and depths of 1,500 feet. The Soviets may also be developing a new, nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine, and by 1970 could probably develop an underwater-launched ballistic missile with a range up to 2,000 miles--more than enough for Soviet needs. Soon thereafter, and perhaps earlier, Soviet missile submarines will probably be conducting patrols well into the North Atlantic, the Pacific, and possibly the Mediterranean.

The Soviets will almost certainly take steps to improve their ASW capabilities in the coming years. They may attempt the development of a ship- or submarine-launched antisubmarine missile and will probably place increased emphasis on the use of submarines in ASW.

In addition, the Soviets will probably continue their efforts to improve their amphibious capabilities. With the improvement of their inland waterways and construction of better icebreakers, they are already attempting to overcome some of the disadvantages imposed by geography.

On Balance

Although improvements are being made, the Soviets are not likely to develop an effective ASW capability or a significant amphibious force in the foreseeable future, and show no signs of developing air cover for support of long-range naval operations. However, the size and increasing capability of the Soviet submarine force, the growing firepower of the USSR's missile-equipped surface ships and shore-based bomber aircraft, and a large naval shipbuilding capacity make Soviet naval and maritime power a force of growing importance in the equation of power between East and West. In spite of the disadvantages of geography, inexperience, and imbalance, the Soviet Navy is able to defend against surface-borne attack by Western naval nuclear strike forces--especially carrier task forces--and, with its expanding missile submarine fleet, is increasing its capability to launch nuclear attacks against distant land targets.

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